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The Impact of Brands on People, Markets and Society

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The impact of brands on people, markets and society

Erik Schoppen

Build Bridge Bond®
Method for sustainable brand leadership

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Method for sustainable brand leadership

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The impact of brands on people, markets and society

Build Bridge Bond®
Method for sustainable brand leadership

Erik Schoppen

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The Build Bridge Bond® method for sustainable brand leadership is a scientifically substantiated management method for building strong mission-driven brands, brand trust and sustainable brand relationships.

The method sees a brand as the (trust) relationship between the brand (organization) and its users, stakeholders and public.

It is the total (holistic) brand experience (thoughts, feelings and behaviors) that a user (collectively or personally) associates with the brand, derived from consistent beliefs and congruent values.

Introduction

The Build Bridge Bond® method for sustainable brand leadership is a scientifically substantiated management method for building strong mission-driven brands, brand trust and sustainable brand relationships. It was developed by H.S. (Erik) Schoppen and investigated by him at the University of Groningen (Social and Behavioral Sciences) during his doctoral research into trust in sustainability.

The abridged version of the BBB method in this prepublication deals with mental brand policy from a macro-economic, a brand strategic and a neuroscientific perspective – because brands and markets cannot exist without people. The method is applicable to issues involving strategic brand and design management in which brand perception, brand experience, brand interaction and brand trust play an integral role.

In addition to knowledge regarding sustainable leadership, trust and behavioral change, it also provides insight into human decision-making behavior, emotions, motives and driving forces. ‘Human-centred’ innovation and brand policy can lead to greater awareness and involvement, stronger brand relationships and a more robust brand trust. This leads to a stronger, independent and more prosocial brand, and a sustainably higher brand equity; organisational capital that in turn can contribute to responsible and future-oriented innovation.

Sustainable brand leadership is about being socially relevant in the long term in a future-proof way

Sustainable brand leadership thus is not only about becoming a winner and maintaining that position in a market category, but also about building meaningful brands that are socially relevant in the long term in a future-proof way. Therefore, the method sees a brand as the (trust) relationship between the brand (organization) and its users, stakeholders and public, derived from consistent beliefs and congruent values.

Summary Build Bridge Bond

Below the content of the BBB method is described in brief.

Towards sustainable and humane brand leadership – The Build Bridge Bond method for sustainable brand leadership is a scientifically based management method for building strong mission driven brands, brand trust and sustainable brand relationships. The method addresses mental brand policy from a macro-economic, a brand-strategic and a neuroscientific perspective and is applicable to strategic brand and design management issues in which brand perception, experience, interaction and trust play an integral role. In addition to knowledge regarding sustainable leadership and behavioral change, it also provides insight into human decision-making behavior, emotions, motives, driving forces and trust.

Trust due to brand relationships – The method views a brand as the relationship between producer and consumer. It is the total experience that a user has with a brand, created according to consistent convictions and core values of a brand organisation.

In essence, sustainable brand leadership is about four important questions:

What is your ‘reason to be’?

This should be the answer to the question from people who want to know who you are, what you do, why you do it and where you are headed (what is your purpose).

What is your ‘reason to believe’?

Which added value do you offer and can you prove that this is the case? This is a brand promise which does more than you promise (in service too).

What is your ‘reason to act’?

Why would people want to join in with you? This is not about buying and using products but about engaging in a relationship.

What is your ‘reason to trust’?

Leadership is about binding stakeholders and users to your brand or brand organisation. The stronger the bond, the greater the trust.

You can answer these questions by going through the transition phases and the brand pillars.

You must then be able to reason back to the starting point. If you have received trust, what can people then mean to your brand or brand organisation? How do they connect to the brand mentally, physically and virtually (in social networks and digital environments). Does their behavior have an effect on the credibility of the brand? And does this behavior suit who you are, what you do (together), why you do this and which direction you would like to take together (based on shared interests)?

Applying the method

Three transition phases are navigated: Build (Brand information), Bridge (Brand influence) and Bond (Brand involvement), via four integrated brand pillars required to develop a brand physically, mentally and socially: Identity, Positioning, Experience and Loyalty. In addition to the three phases and four brand pillars, the method also has three brand modalities (Promise, Partaking and Purpose) which determine the tone of voice of the brand and provides the right information at the right moment in the customer journey.

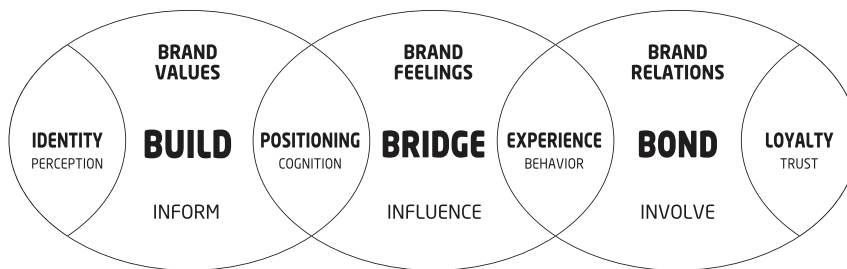


Figure 1

Build Bridge Bond phases and pillars

The three transition phases:

Build transition phase (Brand building)

The awareness and promise phase: developing a meaningful and plausible value proposition, based on the sustainable long-term objectives of the brand organisation and all stakeholders. This is the phase in which people become aware of a brand. Identity and recognition play a role in this. Consumers are informed with relevant brand knowledge which increases the credibility. In this phase the brand promise is made based on an explicitly recognisable and meaningful value proposition, based on the sustainable objectives of the brand organisation, while acknowledging the needs of all of the stakeholders. In this phase the move is made from interest to promise modality.

Bridge transition phase (Brand influence)

The influencing and experiencing phase: Bridging the mental trust gap by offering a solution which makes it possible to have a unique and relevant experience which can be shared. This is the phase in which people consider a brand. This involves emotional aspects such as emotional influencing and positive interactions. The aim in this phase is to convince potential users by bridging the value proposition and thus the mental trust gap. This can be done by offering a unique or relevant brand experience. Brands must tempt or lead people into behavioral change, based on trust. In this phase the move is made from promise to partaking modality.

Bond transition phase (Brand loyalty)

Involvement and interest phase: Gaining sustainable brand trust from stakeholders and users by rewarding participation and the choice(s) based on implicit trust. This is the phase in which people are confirmed in their brand use. In addition to creating a bond, this affirmation and emotional involvement leads to users feeling emotionally recognised and acknowledged. The objective of this phase is to bind users to the brand with a consistent experience which can be shared, and to involve stakeholders and users as much as possible in the (mutual and shared) brand interest. This should lead them to propagate the brand's values. In this phase the move is made from experience to purpose modality.

The four brand pillars:

Identity brand pillar (Perception)

Taking stock of the core, brand and psychosocial values, the physical and visual features (attributes), and the mental and social features (brand meaning and personality). The brand identity is the representation of the brand and can manifest itself in physical (as related to product design, experience and behavior in the real world), online (in the virtual world) or mental (originating from our brains) forms. Generally speaking, this apparition is our first impression of a brand and forms the semantic basis for expressions observed at a later stage and further knowledge building. In addition, experience and behavior also form the mental identity. This 'reason to be' is all about recognition. Which collective values are important?

Positioning brand pillar (Cognition)

Taking stock of the functional and/or emotional needs and suitable brand associations that best characterise a brand (brand associations). Brand positioning is about conquering the preferred cognitive position(s) of a brand in relation to other brands in the mind of the consumer. This position or these positions are built by understanding the functional and emotional needs, values and behaviors of users. The strongest brands contribute value by being relevant and meaningful to people's lives. This 'reason to believe' begins with a believable solution offering added value.

Experience brand pillar (Emotions & Behavior)

Brand experience is the most important factor with regard to whether people wish to engage in a relationship with a brand. Strong brands create a consistent experience which surpasses expectations. Brands that consistently evoke positive emotions use the same neural mechanisms as those used in building human relationships. In addition to undergoing emotions, experience is connected to needs, attitudes and activating behavior. It leads to people being open to sharing something. This 'reason to act' offers stakeholders the opportunity to contribute to shared interests.

Loyalty brand pillar (Trust)

We can view brand loyalty as the connection with the people, products and objectives of a brand or brand organisation. We can steer consumers in their behavior in the direction of finding, developing and maintaining brand trust relationships through positive brand experience, brand affirmation and brand reliance. This is why in brand development and building brand trust the emphasis is not only on identity and positioning (top-of-mind positions in the value proposition), but also on the binding process and creating meaningful (brand) experiences which can be shared. This 'reason to trust' is considered the foundation of a strong brand that creates added value. It is one of the most valuable (mental) attributes that a brand can have, since trust is indispensable in building sustainable (brand) relationships.

Trust is about connectivity based on shared interests, 'in and outside' the brain (association and social networks).

Finally, the method also has three brand modalities. These describe the tone of voice and information which is applicable to a specific situation in the customer journey. People want a suitable story that answers their desire for information at that juncture. Three modalities can be distinguished: Promise (benefit level), Partaking (experience level) and Purpose (interest level). Generally speaking, the promise level is the initial introduction for a consumer. This is primarily about the functional product advantages (Promise). The promise must be authentic and honest, since people will be considering, buying, testing, experiencing and sharing (Partaking). They give the brand their initial trust. If their experience is good, a bond with the brand is created and the brand manufacturer becomes important to the consumer (Purpose).

The three brand modalities:

Promise (Promise modality)

This modality describes the explicitly demonstrable (rational) and functional product advantages. This description determines the positioning, often based on instrumental advantages, such as price, product, manner of production and ingredients. This forms part of the Brand Building phase and this phase can be controlled. The brand owner determines what the brand or brand product and the brand communication look like and what the product does. This often serves as the initial introduction to the brand. While until this point positioning the explicit advantages of the brand promise were the focus, now communicating the brand experience and brand interest become increasingly important.

Partaking (Partaking modality)

This modality describes the implicit and emotional user experience. Who are the users, what is their behavior and who can share the experience? This determines the social brand experience. The brand organisation should address the deeper and shared motives of stakeholders and users. The Partaking modality is part of the Brand binding phase, which is a phase that cannot be controlled. The brand users determine how the brand is used and how they communicate about it (positively or negatively). Displaying their use of the brand and whether or not users subsequently recommend it play a strong role in determining the brand image.

Purpose (Purpose modality)

This modality describes the core values and objectives of the brand organisation. These determine the long-term corporate behavior of the brand owner. This – social and sustainable – behavior also forms the brand personality. (Why do we do the things we do? What is the objective? What does the organisation stand for?) This encompasses the more corporate tone of voice at organisational level. Purpose (purpose modality) forms part of both the Brand building and Brand loyalty phase, and can be viewed as guiding



Tapwater.



Als je een
baas bent
neem je
de leiding



ID&T

Image by ID&T

1 Building future-proof brands

The brand leadership and management method focusing on people, markets and society shows in phases how – based on mission, vision and key values (which form the foundation of the brand identity) – sustainable and committed brand relationships can be established through personal brand interaction and positive user experiences which strengthen the image and brand loyalty. The aim is to build a functional and emotional bond of trust with users. A strong bond between brand and user leads to sustainable brand trust, increases the brand reputation and strengthens confirmation and dependence (the basis of trust). The method can be used to develop product brands and organisation brands, since consumers can have relationships with either of these.

The previous century saw the rise of the insight that, in addition to the products which manufacturers produce, the producing organisation itself can also be a brand. In this case the corporate brand is the starting point for determining the enterprise's strategic course. In other words, the brand serves as business driver for all of the brand organisation's activities, including the products that the organisation produces. As such, the method also ensures that the brand or brand portfolio which is to be developed or redeveloped is in keeping with the core values and purpose (mission, vision and goals) of the brand organisation. The ultimate aim is to understand how a brand organisation can position itself as trusted partner and create added value by making a positive and socially relevant contribution to society with meaningful and sustainably profitable brands. Brands which inspire and tempt consumers to embrace sustainable behavioral change. Various studies¹ have already established that social-ethical businesses that operate in an environmentally conscious manner that exhibit sustainable leadership – or brand leadership – generate more brand equity than average, while also being more profitable both socially and economically.

1.1 Build Bridge Bond method for sustainable brand leadership

The method regards a sustainable brand as one which shares values and connects people. It is an anchor of trust based on sustainable growth, which is meaningful, providing significance, direction and connection, that all stakeholders can identify with. Every effort made in developing a brand should lead to the primary aim: building sustainable trust – the essence of sustainable leadership and sustainable brand leadership. The strongest brand organisations have an inner moral compass which sets a course towards socially responsible and transparent business operations, driven by shared core values, a sustainable prosocial mission and a vision for the future focusing on sustainable growth. With their ideas, products and working methods, they not only increase prosperity, but also the social welfare of people, while (ideally) simultaneously improving the living and working environment. Organisations that invest in people and their environment not only achieve a higher return, but also better succeed in attaining their business and brand objectives, both internally and externally.

These brands create brand involvement by developing brands which are socially relevant. Their objectives relate to all stakeholders and encompass responsibility for the entire production chain; from raw materials, producers and employees to middlemen, consumers and users. They are moving towards the circular economy, an economic system which maximises clean production and reusability of products and raw materials in the chain, while minimising value destruction and waste.

This is only achievable if collaboration takes place in long-term relationships in which users have sustainable brand trust in the organisations and their leadership. The businesses leading the way in this regard will survive the transition to a people-planet-prosperity² driven economy, thus building trust in sustainability.³ Consumers want brand owners to embrace their responsibility and use their influence. They want to be able to trust their sustainable intentions, since increasing numbers of people want to live in a world where positive economic growth does not have negative effects on people and the environment. Ultimately, they wish to only use brand products that meet this description.

1.2 Trust in sustainability

Everything in society revolves around trust, since every relationship is built on sharing trust, whether it is a brief or a long one, be it social or economic. In the sustainable sharing economy, trust plays an even greater role. Not only must the offering party and any middlemen be trustworthy, but users must also trust one another, since they are increasingly using each other's resources; people are no longer purchasing a new product but paying to use or borrow one. Where formerly brand organisations would represent a trustworthy brand and deliver products, now users often are often providing services to one another. Consumers also want brand manufacturers to retain responsibility for products that they have delivered (circular economy). Consumers no longer become owners of the product but gain right of use. The manufacturer ultimately reclaims the product (whether broken or not) to recycle it sustainably. This means that in essence there is a long-term relationship. And since value is being created by cooperation, mutual dependency arises (we take care of one another), creating an even greater symbiosis between brand organisations and their stakeholders. However, people do then need to have prior sustainable brand trust with regard to organisations and their leaders. That begins with radiating sustainable brand credibility, or trust in sustainability.

*The term 'trust in sustainability' (Dutch: *duurzaamheidsvertrouwen*, which Erik Schoppen coined in 2012) can be described as the trust that people or stakeholders have in individuals, groups or organisations with sustainable intentions, or ones that have already manifested themselves in future-proof or sustainable fashion.⁴ Trust in sustainability and sustainable brand trust are becoming increasingly important in a social and economic sense, since brand organisations are able to cause sustainable behavioral change more quickly with their products and exemplary behavior. Brand organisations must not only create prosperity for their stakeholders, but also improve the welfare of people in general. Already, we're seeing that consumers and users are more open to sustainable products and services (nearly 40% of the Dutch in 2013, *Duurzaamheidskompas*, 2014). Concurrently, consumers are taking an increasingly critical stance towards brand organisations that manifest themselves as sustainable, since they do not know how to assess an organisation's sustainable behavior.⁵ The Build Bridge Bond® method can provide greater insight into the correlation between sustainable production and prosocial brand and organisational behavior, thus increasing consumer confidence and, in turn, the transition to a sustainable economy.*

2 BBB – Structure and approach

The Build Bridge Bond® method is based on an interlocking structure. The brand phases and brand pillars featured on the left are highlighted from the perspectives of both brand organisation and user.

The right hand section describes the associated psychological and sociological aspects. In addition to the three phases and brand pillars, the method is also based around three brand modalities: Promise, Partaking and Purpose. These aspects will be discussed later on in this chapter, after the section on the various phases and pillars. The three phases and four associated brand pillars and modalities can be recorded in a work matrix over the course of developing a vision plan. This matrix will be discussed in further detail at the end of this chapter. This chapter describes the method on a point by point basis. We will offer various practical tools and case studies in order to explain how the method can be applied within the brand organisation to develop a new brand portfolio. The psychological and sociological aspects encountered by stakeholders and users during the various phases are featured on the right.

Our brains continually prompt us to seek out, develop and maintain relationships. This is why brand development focuses on creating meaningful (brand) experiences as well as identity and positioning. Such experiences will result in long-term brand relationships, whereby development of the new brand is based around psychological aspects such as awareness, involvement, behavior and trust.

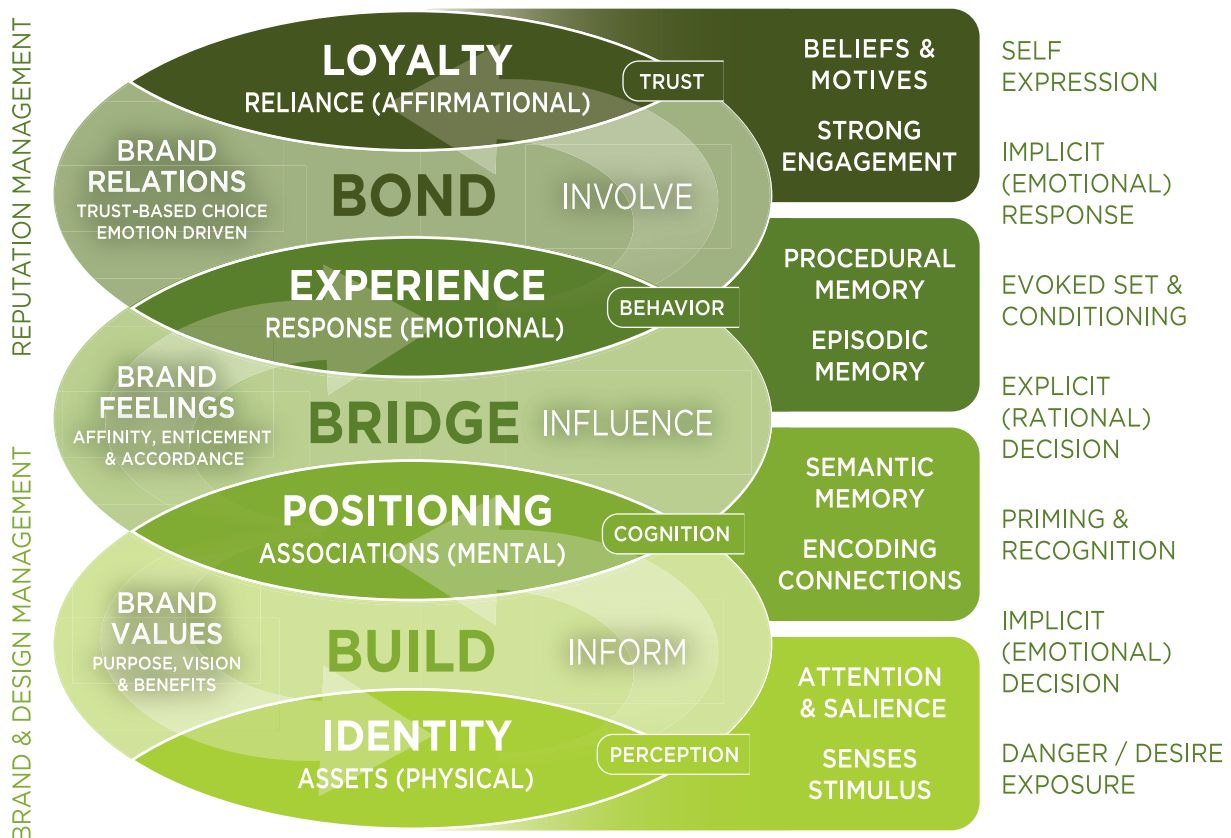


Figure 2

Build Bridge Bond method structure

2.1 Three phases overlapping four brand pillars

The method essentially consists of three transitional phases; Build (Brand building phase), Bridge (Brand experience phase) and Bond (Brand loyalty phase). These phases partially overlap in terms of the four brand pillars that lend a brand its physical and mental form: Identity (brand appearance), Positioning (brand significance), Experience (brand behavior) and Loyalty (brand confidence). The BBB method views brand policy as both a critical success factor (key business driver) and a behavioral modification and management tool aimed at both the internal organisation and external end user. Congruent brand development, both verbal and non-verbal, will require alignment between the image and behavior of the brand organisation on the one hand and perception and behavior of the end user on the other. The overview of the various phases in the BBB structure clearly reflects this focus on both perspectives (brand organisation and user).

2.2 Brand consistency and congruence in all phases and pillars

The left part of the diagram features the three phases and four brand pillars. All three phases will be completed during the development process. This will ensure that the four pillars are consistently and congruently elaborated in terms of brand perception, cognition, behavior and confidence. All brand touch-points will then remain recognisable in terms of identity, experience and use. This degree of congruence will be crucial, as the brand will also be encountered by people with no prior knowledge. For example, someone may encounter the brand for the first time when an existing user shows them the product or service or has them try it out. The initial brand experience must then match subsequently acquired brand knowledge; people want to know whether their investment in terms of resources and behavior will yield the same result at a later stage. This will require consistency in terms of the brand's actions. Deeper (purchasing) motives must also be taken into account (these will serve as starting points for any efforts to build trust amongst users). Brand choice behavior can initially be subdivided into functional (rational) and symbolic (emotional) considerations.⁶

2.3 The brand organisation and stakeholders jointly make up the brand

Consumers encountering a brand product for the first time will weigh both its functional and rational benefits (price, quality, usefulness, etc.) and the various symbolic and emotional aspects (does the brand image match my self-expression, identity, emotions and lifestyle). The method is thus based around two-way interaction between the brand organisation and end user. Together, they form the physical, virtual and mental brand identity, image and experience, and thus jointly serve as both brand creator and (intellectual) brand owner. This form of collaboration can yield a sense of Shared Brand Ownership⁷ and a shared sense of responsibility for the brand image (brand reputation). In other words: all sensory (tangible) brand attributes, such as registered trademark and product characteristics, will remain property of the brand organisation (falling within the domain of brand & design management), whereas all intellectual (intangible) brand knowledge, brand associations, emotions and routines are owned by the person having these thought processes (falling within the reputation management domain). Once these intellectual brand characteristics manifest themselves in the form of tangible brand-related behaviors in the virtual or physical world (such as recommendations or purchases), actual value will be created. Both aspects will be discussed in this chapter.

Value creation starts with sharing

Although most brand organisations currently still determine the form in which their products are brought to the market (with Apple being the most extreme case in point), a growing number of companies are factoring in consumers' demand for new products or changes to existing ones. Where this is not possible, new businesses are increasingly market their products independently, through crowd funding or other constructions – whereby all co-investors come to own a stake in the company. In a broad sense, *Shared Brand Ownership* can be described as a collaborative effort by multiple brand owners or end users – optionally in collaboration with brand organisations – to develop, manufacture, use and market products and services. However, it all starts with the online and offline sharing of brand-related information, which is a crucial aspect in the process of building any brand.

An international study conducted in 2014 in eight countries by PR firm Edelman⁶ identified six dimensions in relation to the sharing of brand-related information:

Shared dialogue

People are often willing to share suggestions and improvements. Brands need to listen to their target audience, and respond and act accordingly. Although brands like to think they are engaged in a dialogue (by transmitting), consumers tend to have a different perception (they want to be heard, and expect a response). Genuine attempts by brands to engage in this manner often mark the start of a sustainable brand relationship.

Shared experience

People want to have shared experiences. Users and brands can jointly participate in experiences if brands facilitate the sharing of these experiences through a social media platform (e.g. photosharing on Instagram). This will be especially effective if the brand can ensure that new experiences are useful and meaningful, thus remaining connected to consumers' activities in the virtual and real worlds. As regards more developed markets, this will generally concern efforts to facilitate the wishes and needs of consumers.

Shared goals

People are more likely to use brands that help them achieve their personal goals. Although this may extend to common goals, they are more likely to be personal in nature: people tend to want things that can help them achieve their own goals independently. Brand products must facilitate efforts to achieve personalised goals, rather than present ready-made solutions. In situations where people do not rely on their own knowledge, as is often the case with financial services and technologies, targeted advice and shared objectives will be appreciated.

Shared values

People want to believe in the same things. Users reward brands that openly share their values. Almost 50% of respondents would like greater transparency on the organisation, production and origins of their products (insight into the production chain), while no less than 40% would like to see local initiatives by brand organisations. Despite being quite commonplace, such initiatives and efforts to provide transparency are not always optimally visible to consumers.

Shared products

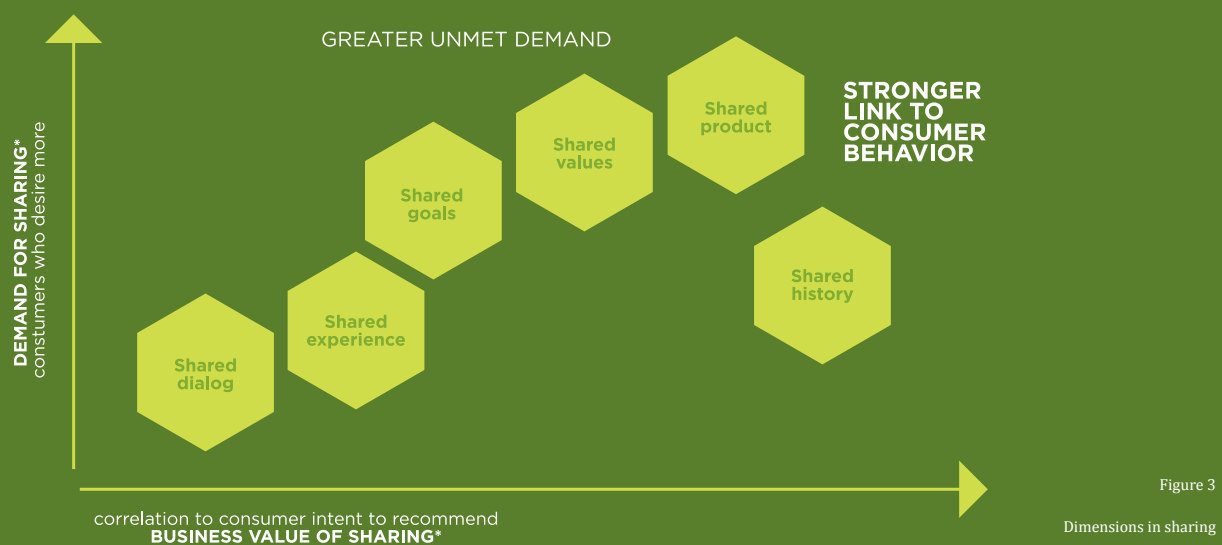
People want to co-create products and have the brand manufacture them. If brands are willing to produce such products, consumers will be willing to buy and use them. The willingness to involve consumers in their product development process offers major opportunities for brands. For example, no less than nine out of ten respondents indicated that they wished to be involved and acknowledged in this area, while consumers want full transparency on a product's performance and comparative information on competitors.

Shared history

People want to know the brand's story. A brand narrative helps to personalise and humanise the brand, and can represent a character, stereotype or archetype. Although consumers generally don't explicitly demand that brands share their history, a brand's willingness to share its heritage is one of the most accurate predictors of consumer willingness to recommend or buy its products.

The brand's history will generally be an effective predictor of its future direction. For instance, renowned champagne brand Moët & Chandon will always be associated with the French champagne region whereas the general public is less invested in the geographical origins of the Absolut Wodka brand (Sweden).

The origins of a brand can also be applied to persuasive effect. For example, the turbulent history of the Cuban revolution plays a key role in the brand narrative communicated by Bacardi, an originally Cuban rum brand. This has a great impact on the brand's image and characteristics (archetype of the social revolutionary, representing freedom and a passion for life).



When it comes to sharing, some issues may be more relevant than others. In general, substantive and meaningful forms of sharing will be more likely to result in product recommendations and intent to purchase. Where brands tend to focus on their history (brand narrative), consumers are more future-oriented; their story starts with the discovery and sharing of information and potential purchase and use of a brand product (more on this in paragraph 6.4.3). Images are best suited for immediate sharing – especially through online ‘SoLoMo’ media (social-local-mobile-apps such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etcetera.) Shopping and purchasing behavior has also changed as a result of location-based mobile media, allowing for information to be received and shared anytime and anywhere.

Source: <http://www.edelman.com/insights/intellectual-property/brandshare/six-dimensions-of-sharing/>

3 BBB – The three transitional phases

The method consists of three transitional phases; Build (Brand building phase), Bridge (Brand experience phase) and Bond (Brand loyalty phase). This paragraph describes the Build, Bridge and Bond phases, as well as the various associated brand objectives:



Figure 4 The three Build Bridge Bond transitional phases

3.1 Build – brand credibility and informing

This aim of this phase is to raise brand awareness by communicating a relevant brand promise. This promise should be based on an explicitly recognisable and meaningful value proposition that is rooted in the brand organisation's sustainable long-term objectives and takes the needs of all stakeholders into account. Organisations can achieve this goal by communicating the brand (brand awareness) through channels that suit the (desired) users. Alternatively, brand awareness can also be created by activating the brand on the basis of its brand identity (brand salience, recall & recognition⁸). This can be achieved by positioning on the basis of a functional or emotional need, the brand its purpose or a recognisable and credible brand personality or archetype.

Brand archetypes describe brands' (unconscious) motives and aspirations, as reflected in the behavioral characteristics of a brand personality.⁹ Brand organisations must thus be able to explain – on the basis of their unique mission, vision and core values – their objectives and propositions in a transparent, consistent and congruent manner so that users can accumulate and share brand knowledge. What does the organisation and brand (or brand portfolio) stand for, what makes the brand and brand product suitable, inspiring and unique (positioning) and what are the functional and emotional benefits (the solution's promise, distinctive capacity and added value). Whereas organisations previously set their own course, determining their own credibility in the process, stakeholders are now increasingly involved in the effort to build a brand's image and significance. As mentioned, the brand organisation and stakeholders jointly form the brand.

3.2 Bridge – brand consideration and influencing

The aim of this phase is to convince potential users by delivering on the brand promise and bridging the mental confidence gap. This can be achieved by offering a unique or relevant brand experience. Brands need to persuade people to change their behavior on the basis of trust. Brand organisations can achieve this goal by bridging the mental confidence gap: getting people to learn about the brand (brand knowledge), try the brand (brand experience), and value and trust the brand (by ensuring the appropriate brand significance and delivering on the brand promise through positive interaction). This phase is about the meaningful (cognitive) and affective behavioral (conative) interaction that ensues when consumers and users interact with the brand (brand touchpoints) and use the brand (brand experience), and the resulting dialogue (brand dialogue). Behavioral intent towards brand usage can be encouraged at each stage by eliciting a positive emotional response (nudging¹⁰). This (voluntary) persuasion in terms of brand consideration and purchasing behavior will eventually yield more rapid implicit brand preference and partially unconscious/automatic behavioral modification (routines). In addition to the desired perception, cognition and user-friendliness, a satisfying brand experience will thus emphasise the associative emotional values elicited by the brand during the choice process and interaction between the brand (product), system (performance) and users amongst themselves (peers). This will eventually result in greater brand appreciation, desired responses and behavioral modification.

3.3 Bond – brand reinforcement and involvement

The aim of this phase is to bind users to the brand by means of a consistent and shareable experience, whereby users are optimally involved in the brand its purpose. The emphasis is on creating a sustainable sense of confidence amongst users and stakeholders by rewarding participation and choices made on the basis of (implicit) trust. This will require credible commitment by the organisation itself. The organisation must encourage future-proof initiative by achieving improvements in collaboration with its users. Listening and responding will yield positive affirmation (brand affirmation¹¹) and greater consumer confidence (brand reputation). As a result, consumers will be more likely to use and recommend the products and services. In addition to creating a sense of connection, this emotional involvement will also ensure that the user feels emotionally acknowledged (social esteem & self-confidence¹²). This close relationship will ensure that the brand becomes part of the user's identity, and encourage users to communicate the brand to the outside world (as loyal brand ambassadors). This will create a mutual dependency (reliance¹²); the brand depends on its users, while users depend on the brand (the brand organisation represents the long-term interests of all stakeholders). This underlines the importance of credibility and trust. The stronger the sense that the brand will act in a positive and predictable manner, the stronger the dependency and reinforcement of existing brand confidence. This leads us to the aspect of brand credibility (Build phase).

Create a sustainable sense of confidence amongst users and stakeholders by rewarding their participation and choices made on the basis of (implicit) trust.

4 BBB – The four brand pillars

In addition to concrete brand-related aspects, the brand pillars will also be discussed in terms of their underlying physical, mental, emotional and behavioral facets. For example, perception shapes our view of the world and the brands that operate within it, while cognition enables us to understand the world and learn lessons when things go right or wrong. If the expected outcomes of our behavior are reinforced by successful experiences, we gain a sense of confidence. All four brand pillars are crucial in developing a brand at physical, intellectual and social level.

This is reflected in the various elements of brand strategy: identity enables us to recognise a brand at sensory level, while positioning determines the brand's positioning in our minds, society at large, the market or a specific product category. When combined, these aspects lend a brand its distinctive capacity – a unique selling proposition (USP) – forming the basis for the brand promise. This will help to ensure a quick and efficient selection process. If this leads people to use a product or service which then successfully fulfils its brand promise, users will develop a positive emotional response. Ideally, this promise will then yield a consistently positive brand experience, leading to a sense of trust through brand affirmation and – eventually – dependency (brand reliance). The brand and its products will then become an important factor in consumers' lives, and play a role in their efforts to shape an individual identity. Brand identity will then have become part of the consumer's personal identity, with all the associated emotional values. Consumers that are loyal to a specific brand will independently communicate the brand identity, acting as de facto ambassadors that support the brand organisation's objectives.

The below section provides a description of the various brand pillars and explains how they can be developed in terms of individual consumers, markets and broader society. This chapter does not discuss the methodology in terms of the actual pillars. These are specific areas of expertise that can be further elaborated at tactical and operational level once the strategic objectives have been determined.

4.1 Brand identity (brand perception)

Brand identity can be viewed as a representation of the actual brand. This representation can manifest itself in physical (as related to product design, experience and behavior in the real world), online (in the virtual world) or mental (originating from our brains) forms. In addition to tangible and other sensory qualities (such as visual and auditory brand elements and attributes), a brand identity also involves mental and social characteristics (brand significance and personality). Brand identities tend to have the greatest appeal if they reflect our own current or desired self-image and behavior and/or those of other individuals within a group. Ideally, the brand personality (often relevant in the case of manufacturer and product brands), brand mission and objectives (in the case of manufacturer or organisational brands) should also reflect users' individual behaviors. In addition to the various physical and mental elements, brand identity thus extends to manifestations (such as behavior) that uniquely identify a brand or organisation.

Physical and mental identity

Brand identity can be subdivided into physical and mental identities. This physical visual identity generally takes the form of Corporate Identity (in the case of organisational brands) and Brand Identity (in the case of a manufacturer or product brand). This could be described as the visual system of brand

elements, including the brand name, logo, symbol, typography, colour, images and language (brand language). These are visualisations of the name, core values, vision, objectives and benefits that most accurately characterise the brand. A physical identity can take many forms, including visual (in the form of a logotype, icon, brand language or user interface), auditory (sound logo or jingle) or tactile (in the form of a brand object, such as the famous Coca Cola bottle, Zippo lighter or iPod). These aspects are also referred to as physical brand attributes (brand assets).

A clear brand identity will ensure that the product is recognisable (brand salience) and distinctive. This identity can be applied to reduce more complex brand knowledge or deeper symbolic brand significance to an accessible logo or logotype through the use of brand symbols.

Language also plays a key role in this respect. Brand language can be applied to visually articulate a brand organisation or product, but can also be used to provide a distinctive and uniquely worded description. Brand language serves to create an associative relationship between the brand and specific words, terms or ideas¹³ (more on this in the subsequent paragraphs).

The mental identity, which is made up of aspects including mission, vision, core values, brand associations, brand promise and brand personality, can be distilled into a brand mantra (brand essence) which can then become part of the visual brand identity in the form of a tagline or baseline.¹⁴ This identity is often linked to the brand organisation's purpose.

Importance of Brand Identity in Brand Modalities

The brand identity also comprises the brand modalities: Promise, Partaking, Purpose (the brand's tone of voice, see paragraph 5). Amongst other aspects, these modalities describe communication methods tailored to the behavior of stakeholders and users within and outside of the brand organisation, and identifiable functional and emotional interactions with and loyalty to the brand (more on this in 4.3). For example, the 'swing top' on certain Grolsch beer bottles is a key part of Grolsch's brand promise and identity. However, it is also key to the functional and emotional drinking experience associated with Grolsch beer. Users view the sound of the bottle top opening as an essential component of their experience. Although this does not necessarily mean they consciously think about the sound every time they open a bottle, it is crucial to their pleasurable routine and would be sorely missed. For this reason alone, Grolsch – known for its characteristic swing-top bottles since 1897 – would never consider replacing the swing top. The company is greatly invested in communicating its core values, such as its attention and passion for artisanal brewing. Identity is not limited to the brand's physical representation and image: the consumer's perception and mental experience also make up a crucial element.

Importance of first impressions (brand perception)

In most cases, the perceptible identity will be the user's first sensory introduction to the brand. Brand identity is an unavoidable sensory introduction. Consumers can see, hear, smell, feel or taste it. What draws their attention, and stimulates their senses? What is it, what does it do, and how does it invite us to view or try the product? Is it safe or exciting (at the same time)? In a world where consumers are bombarded with stimuli, but searching for relevance and meaning, the brand will have to answer all these questions through its brand identity. The identity forms the starting point for our relationship with a brand.

Brand identity is an unavoidable sensory introduction.

The relationship between identity and image

On the one hand, brand management concerns the development and strategic management of identity, brand knowledge and experience. It also extends to image and reputation management and relationship management. Whereas the brand identity is determined by an organisation's internal vision and brand values, the image is comprised of people's external perceptions which may or may not be based on existing positioning of the organisation and its products and services.

Importance of Brand knowledge

The more familiar the audience is with a specific brand identity, the more brand knowledge it will have. This knowledge of brand identity helps set a brand apart from the competition and serves as a basis for the audience's brand attitude. A positive brand image will ensure that consumers respond well to products and are willing to engage in an intensive and active relationship with the brand on the basis of emotional and financial investments (brand loyalty). The stronger this identification between consumer and brand, the more eager the consumer will be to engage in a relationship with the brand ('This brand suits me'). It is thus important to ensure that the existing (current) brand identity and desired (aspirational) identity of the brand and user are effectively aligned. A credible brand image will be crucial to this process. Minimising the discrepancy between identity and image is thus a key brand objective in terms of the positioning process. The proposition should be as closely aligned with the brand as possible. In some cases, this may not be possible as the user's perception differs too greatly from the image being communicated by the brand organisation. For instance, Shell may view its own approach as sustainable¹⁵ while many others may beg to differ.

Importance of Brand Image (as part of Brand Reputation)

Image can be described as the public's collective perception of a brand or brand organisation, including all underlying perceived meanings ascribed to a brand, category, product or service by stakeholders, consumers and the general public (non-users).¹⁶ The effectiveness of a brand image can also be measured on the basis of the brand's credible distinctive capacity in combination with the degree of trust amongst users and audience members. Companies that claim to be customer friendly but offer extremely poor customer service will rapidly lose their customers' trust and loyalty. Brand image is thus closely linked to the amount of added value (brand equity) a brand has already built up. The more well-known, credible and confidence-inspiring the brand, the greater its financial value. In addition to building a strong brand, strategic brand management is thus also aimed at maintaining existing added brand value and positively influencing aspects thereof.

Gap Analysis

The BBB method can also be applied to take stock of the difference between a brand's current and desired identity (gap analysis). This involves brand organisations taking stock of their current identity by means of an identity and image assessment, and subsequently formulating their desired identity by completing the various BBB phases. Implementation of the new (desired) identity can lead to an improved image if brand policies are implemented in a consistent and congruent manner.

Brand ambassadors don't necessarily have to be customers

People that value a brand do not necessarily always have to use the actual brand product to help build its image. For example, many people like exclusive fashion brands or expensive sports cars but are in no position to purchase them due to high pricing. However, they can still serve as brand ambassadors by promoting the brand in other ways. Many exclusive brands offer accessible brand extensions (such as Porsche sunglasses) or cheaper accessories (such as Ferrari key chains), enabling people to (partially) experience their favourite brands. However, the brand owner then runs the risk of damaging the brand's exclusivity, potentially endangering its credibility. For instance, Rolex is one of the world's most expensive watch brands, a real prestige brand. Rolex watches are perceived as a status symbol the world over, due to their high purchase price. People buy this famous brand to distinguish themselves from the masses (self-expression). Rolex will never market cheaper versions of its product, as this would immediately damage its high-quality image and painstakingly developed brand confidence. The brand's original customers would feel cheated, and – along with the general public – perceive Rolex' reputation and added brand value to have been diminished.

People can thus have positive or negative opinions on a brand regardless of whether or not they are part of the target group. This means the general public can express negative sentiments about a brand without ever having had any bad personal experiences as a user. This is an important aspect of the image and brand management process. A brand is, in essence, the result of the perception, knowledge, experience and behavior of their users, but also the result of the spectators that influence the users.

A social and sustainable purpose (mission, vision and goals) will elicit trust

A recognisable identity and an inspirational mission will create a sense of trust, as they emphasise the brand purpose – the brand organisation's future-oriented corporate behavior. For example, a growing number of consumers feel brand owners should take responsibility and strive towards more sustainable goals (Dossier Duurzaam, 2014).

Social significance

In order to sustain the mutual dependency inherent to any sustainable brand-customer relationship, a growing number of companies are now justifying their existence on the basis of their social and sustainable purpose in addition to their functional objectives. These are sustainable and pro-social brands on the forefront of efforts to build a more social society. They have the audacity to show sustainable leadership and take responsibility, and are taking on social significance as a result of their trusted status. The consumers that purchase these sustainable and pro-social brands generally support the organisation's mission, and are more likely to display loyal user behavior and view the brand as reliable. For more information on brand loyalty and the effort to build brand confidence, see 4.4.

A social and sustainable purpose will elicit trust.

4.2 Brand positioning (brand meaning)

Many products and services are developed to meet a functional and/or emotional need (earthenware and wine, textile and fashion, etc.) or have been made possible by a new technology (such as cars and aircraft, made possible by the combustion engine). These brand products were generally named after their original creator and/or founder. As multiple manufacturers started producing the same products, the 'branding' of products became increasingly important as a way of standing out from other providers. As brand portfolios expanded to include a diverse range of products over the second half of the last century, demand for brand management services grew.

As companies evolved into organisational brands offering a range of product brands, brand policies and the resulting product positioning strategies became part of a strategic development process, based in and shaped by the organisation's core competences, underlying brand architecture (differentiation on the basis of portfolio, competition and consumer insights) and positioning on the basis of similarities and differences. In order to survive, brands must continually innovate and surprise.

However, they must also retain their authenticity and recognisability so that users continue to identify with the brand ('This brand suits me'). Achieving this goal will require thorough knowledge of the brand's relationships with people, markets and broader society. In order to ensure future-proof brand management, an organisation's brand portfolio must be strategically aligned with the parent organisation's broadly communicated vision and mission.

Positioning on the basis of human, sustainable values

The scope of a brand's positioning strategy may extend from pure hedonistic pleasure (satisfying personal needs) to sharing and contributions to a collective sense of social responsibility (meeting broader societal needs). Both approaches can elicit a positive emotional response (brand sentiments). Finding a balance (read: positioning) that brings out the best of both worlds and creates a 'do good, feel good' brand is both an art and a science. After all, it's fine to use brand products for hedonistic pleasure as long as this doesn't harm others or lead to antisocial behavior. As our world becomes increasingly transparent, negative emotional responses are instantly shared on social media but can take forever to remove. This results in unnecessary and often permanent reputational damage. A growing number of consumers want organisations to invest in the future instead of merely maximising short-term profits on behalf of their shareholders. After all, the latter doesn't yield any added value for the consumer. Companies that choose to create sustainable added value in collaboration with their shareholders fare better with consumers. As we know from research, consumers have a more positive view of socially responsible companies and a more positive perception of their brands.¹⁷

From thinking to feeling

Although brands can persuade on the basis of a promise, they can only become tangible and emotionally relevant to consumers through direct experience. This is why many brands focus their positioning on less tangible behavioral and conscientious aspects rather than factual and functional attributes: this helps them to build up an emotional connection with the user.¹⁸ Positioning efforts are increasingly centred around people and their behavior. In addition to stimulating brand association and the transfer of information in the – more functional and language-oriented – semantic memory, brand organisations try to target the emotional, episodic memory during the brand building process. This part of our memory is concerned with the what, how, when and why of our actions.

The brand owner will try to adopt the perspective of the user's mental world. Positioning on the basis of durable emotional values has proven to be effective,¹⁹ as it speaks to consumers' sense of humanity and environmental and social consciousness.

From brand knowledge to brand attitude

We will need brand knowledge to link functional and emotional attributes (brand associations) to a brand. This knowledge consists of two components: brand awareness and brand image. Both are key in determining the consumer's attitude to the brand (brand attitude). What does the brand stand for, what makes it inspiring and unique, and what benefits does it offer? The better-known a brand becomes, the more people will have a shared perception and the more important the brand image will be. Brand associations are key factors in the decision-making process in terms of both brand knowledge and brand attitudes. We need brand knowledge to form a rational opinion on the brand (is it credible), whereas brand attitudes are generally key to the emotional assessment process (the process of deciding between different brands). Products are often purchased on the basis of emotional reasons, which are subsequently rationalised. This is why the brand promise must include both meaningful (cognitive), emotional (affective) and behavioral (conative) aspects in order to yield behavioral intentions.

From brand credibility to brand consideration

In addition to the aforementioned aspects – needed to ensure credibility and elicit behavioral intentions – a brand promise must offer added value in three specific areas: it must be relevant, speak to us on a personal level (affinity), appealing, enticing and distinctive (enticement) and should reflect our sense of security and personal value system (accordance).²⁰ Once the positioning meets these three requirements, we will consider using the brand (display behavioral intention). We are most likely to be influenced during this phase. Whereas the brand promise previously focused its positioning on explicit benefits (the functional and emotional attributes translated into a USP²¹), brand partaking (social interaction and user experience) and an identifiable brand purpose are now becoming increasingly key to our brand attitude. In addition to highlighting the product proposition, positioning currently emphasises communication of the underlying corporate organisational values. For example, Ben & Jerry's represents high-quality fair-trade ice cream but its positioning also focuses on the company's social and sustainability mission. Multinational Unilever acquired the successful company in 2000. The company's socially responsible business strategy effectively reflected the new Unilever vision formulated in 2009: 'We aim to make sustainable living commonplace.'²² Unilever CEO Paul Polman: 'We only want to reward performance that leads to sustainable growth. Companies should focus on things that guarantee a long-term future.' As we can see, positioning starts with a distinctive value proposition and clear brand promise. However, this positioning must then persuade consumers to engage with a positive brand experience, the quality and safety of which is guaranteed by a demonstrable and credible brand purpose. As a case in point, Unilever features its logo on all its brand products and communications as a 'trusted indicator of sustainability', a way of showing consumers that any brand with a 'U' is the right choice for our planet. Despite occasional criticism, the multinational is showing its good intentions: Unilever wants to ensure that all its raw materials are sustainably sourced by 2020. This commitment is undeniably valued by a great many people. In addition to offering distinctiveness and certainty, brands must thus give people a warm, good feeling. Unilever views global growth and social responsibility as inextricably linked goals, and has since been working to align its entire brand portfolio with its social and sustainability mission.²³

Brand superiority through powerful associations

When examined from a psychological perspective, brand positioning can be viewed as a brand's existing position – either in relation to other brands or independently – as determined by people's perceptions and experience. Our purchasing decisions are often based on such existing positions (brand preferences), as we rely on our brand knowledge to make – often emotionally-driven – choices. These brands offer us a sense of certainty and stability. At heart, effective brand positioning thus revolves around achieving brand superiority in the consumer's mind by building neural networks of brand associations (consisting of characteristics and benefits) that describe the brand most accurately.²⁵ This is referred to as mental representation: our association-based image of the brand, product or service's characteristics. These characteristics must also be linked to positive (emotional) connotations. The brands with the greatest and strongest knowledge and association networks will win out, achieving 'top-of-mind awareness' during the selection process (this term refers to the first brand or behavior to spontaneously enter the consumer's mind). They have become part of what is known as the evoked set, a group of suitable relevant brands that are familiar to consumers or reflect their behavior. Brands that have achieved this distinctive or even leading market position represent the greatest added brand value (brand equity); in addition to representing financial value on the company balance sheet, they also create social value by being significant and relevant. Brands thus offer clarity, direction and structure, and can literally change and improve people's lives as a result of their emotional and social significance.

Managing your physical assets and mental properties

Positioning extends to both the strategic management of all distinctive brand elements (logos, brand names, packaging, domain names, interfaces, icons, etc.) and management of the brand's mental positioning in terms of brand awareness, knowledge, preferences, brand experience (such as ease of use) and confidence. Effective use of the right set of brand elements and representations of the appropriate values can help increase brand awareness and build strong, positive and suitable brand associations.



Figure 5 Managing physical and mental properties

Brand modalities (Promise, Partaking and Purpose) play an important role in communicating the proposition of the brand. Modalities emphasize the different aspects of the brand proposition (brand knowledge, brand feelings and brand behaviors). Each modality has its function of increasing the identifiable functional and emotional interaction of the brand by increasing the association networks by the user. Therefore, the goal of many digital (interactive) media is to keep users as long as possible on their platform, building stronger behavioral patterns and permanent neural memory connections. Positioning is thus the 'mental design' of perception, emotions and behavior (behavioral design).

Neural networks and mental representation

Permanent neural memory connections are created in our brain when we encounter a brand frequently. These are short, neural memory circuits that start firing together following repeated exposure, thus strengthening each other's intermediate connections (fire and wire together). For example, if people think of Swedish meatballs (a mental representation) they are also likely to think of IKEA (another mental representation). Both neural networks (the network dedicated to the Swedish meatballs and the network for IKEA) will start to fire, strengthening each other's intermediate neural connections. Now, Jamie Oliver also has a recipe for Swedish meatballs. If you regularly prepare this recipe using one of his cookbooks, you're likely to think of Jamie Oliver when you see Swedish meatballs at IKEA: all three neural association networks will start firing together. As a result, both IKEA and Jamie Oliver will become strong mental representations in our brain. The longer these networks fire, the more we will associate these memory connections with a brand. Underneath you see an association network (or brand engram) of the brand Starbucks.

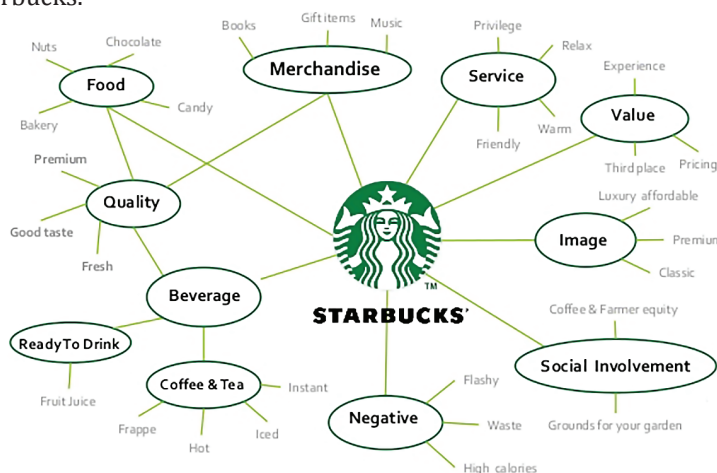


Figure 6

Association network Starbucks

Source: slideshare.net/brand-auditstarbucks-thailand

Using brand engrams to 'claim' and manage your 'top-of-mind' knowledge domains

These mental representations at neural level are also referred to as brand engrams.²⁶ The development of a strong brand engram for brand products or services is crucial to modern-day brand organisations. This brand will then become 'top of mind', evoking the greatest amount of relevant associations and performing better than its potential competitors. This is why it is so crucial to make strategic choices about the knowledge domains you wish to claim (you can't be the best in everything). For example, Dutch coffee brand Douwe Egberts evokes much stronger associations in the warm and cosy 'nearby' family domain than Nespresso, which evokes more 'distant' cosmopolitan associations. Both brands thus represent more than good product values – coffee, in this case – alone (instrumental benefits). Their value lies in the accumulated relational values (emotional benefits). It is thus important to keep in mind that our memory does not merely store semantic word associations – it also stores all associated images, emotions, social feelings, tastes, smells, learned product behaviors and social behaviors, etc. All these elements come together in interlinked neural networks. The more often such interconnected associations are jointly evoked by stimuli in specific situations, the deeper these connections will be anchored in our memory, reinforcing the links between specific associations. Some associations are eventually permanently stored in our long-term memories (consolidation). Once they have been firmly anchored in our brains, these hard-wired connections between associations and behaviors are seldom forgotten. Our engrained thought patterns are then used (often automatically and unconsciously) in routine (permanently modified) selection, purchasing and user behaviors.

Primary and secondary brand associations

Brand associations can be both primary and secondary in nature. Primary brand associations (also referred to as core brand associations) directly relate to the brand, are often descriptive in nature and contribute to brand knowledge and brand image. Secondary brand associations relate to external factors and have a broader context due to the diverse range of brand connotations. These are the secondary (personal) meanings and emotional values associated with a brand. They are often comprised of personal emotions and subjective meanings, and generally cannot be generically reproduced by the brand itself. Core brand associations, on the other hand, concern the actual brand product and are imbued with meaning by the brand organisation. The strongest brands successfully link primary and secondary associations, creating larger knowledge structures in the consumer's mind. This results in transfer between existing brand-related and other knowledge and experiences built up over the course of the consumer's personal life and new, product-related information. The brand can then leverage associations (applying familiar brand associations to introduce new products in a new category), creating added brand value.

Brands can thus be linked to other things or people with existing knowledge structures in the consumer's mind. This could be the company making the product, the production location or place of sale, as well as specific people, places or things associated with the product. Once the brand is linked to other things or people that evoke their own unique combination of associations, consumers may expect several of these associations to be characteristic of the product. Marketeers can thus create added brand value by 'borrowing' from other sources, regardless of the product's specific branding, characteristics or any auxiliary marketing programmes.

Primary brand associations directly relate to the brand, secondary brand associations relate to external factors and have a broader context due to the secondary (personal) meanings and emotional values associated with a brand.

This indirect method of building up added brand value mainly involves efforts to capitalise on existing secondary brand knowledge. Secondary associations can be especially useful when linking positive brand associations to a brand in order to create points of convergence, or unique brand associations that can help a brand stand out during positioning efforts. This part of the chapter discusses the various tools used to create secondary brand knowledge by linking the brand with the following aspects:

1. businesses (by means of brand strategies);
2. countries or other geographical areas (by specifying the product's origins);
3. distribution channels (by means of channel strategies);
4. other brands (by means of co-branding);
5. people and characters (by means of licensing);
6. spokespeople (by means of recommendations);
7. events (by means of sponsoring);
8. other third parties (by means of rewards and assessments);
9. personal memories (by activating the consumer's own experiences).

The first three aspects are origin-related: who makes the product, where is it manufactured, and where is it sold? The remaining six aspects relate to themselves, persons, places and things. The extent to which these aspects or persons can be used to leverage added brand value will generally depend on the consumer's degree of knowledge on this specific aspect or person. The ease with which relevant associations with or reactions to this aspect or person can be transferred to the brand is also key. General credibility-related or attitudinal dimensions will generally be easier to transfer than specific associations with characteristics and benefits, although the latter can be transferred. However, efforts to associate the brand with other things or people do pose a risk. Many secondary associations relate to individual memories and experiences. As a result, they can be difficult to manage during the transferral process, and cannot be controlled by the brand organisation (this aspect is unmanageable). This will be discussed in further detail in the section on Brand Modality in 5.

Creating new brand associations

The consumer can form mental associations by establishing a connection between the brand and themselves or someone else. They can then establish connections with other associations, such as opinions, feelings and other associated aspects. In most cases, this secondary brand knowledge will affect the assessment of a new product when the consumer lacks the motivation or opportunity to assess product-related aspects. In other words: if consumers have no or little interest in the product or feel they do not possess the necessary knowledge to choose the right brand, they will be more likely to take brand decisions on the basis of secondary considerations. These decisions will then be based on what they think, feel or know about the product's country of origin, the store at which it is being sold or another characteristic.

Influence on existing brand knowledge

Such efforts to link the brand to other aspects can both create new brand associations, and affect existing ones. The process works as follows: consumers have some degree of knowledge of a specific issue or individual. The suggestion that there are associations between a brand and this issue or individual may lead consumers to assume that specific characteristic associations, opinions or feelings linked to this issue or individual are also characteristic of the brand. Such derived assumptions are predicted by various theoretical psychological mechanisms. These include 'cognitive consistency': the consumer believes that what applies to a specific issue or individual must also apply to the relevant brand. An engaged communication policy, whereby charitable causes are linked to brands, can help build up brand awareness by means of memory and recognition. This can help improve the brand image in terms of the identity characteristics 'friendly' and 'generous'. It can also evoke brand sentiments such as social approval and self-respect. Associations between the brand and good cause can also create a positive attitude in terms of the characteristics 'reliable' and 'likeable'. In the event of a natural alignment, the brand can create experiences through participation in charitable activities.

Conveying an effective message

Opinions and feelings may be easier to transfer than concrete associations, which probably seem irrelevant or are too strongly linked to the original issue to be transferred. The more similarities consumers can see between social engagement and the brand, the more likely they will be to derive comparable knowledge about the brand.

Social Branding

A good example of a natural and socially-relevant collaboration between a sports brand and a charitable cause engaged in international humanitarian cooperation through sports and games would be the Red Ball initiative by Adidas and Right to Play, an international, humanitarian organisation driven by athletes. Right to Play organises sporting and game events in an attempt to contribute to community development in deprived areas. Right to Play's brand symbol consists of a red ball accompanied by the message 'Look after yourself, Look after one another'. Adidas has committed itself to the charitable cause for a four-year period. The added brand value generated by Right to Play's message represents a secondary association for the Adidas brand. The collaboration is facilitated by the efforts and initiatives of Adidas staff members, the brand's contributions to athletes and sports clubs, the supply of sports materials and clothing and the sale of a merchandising range exclusively available in all Adidas brand stores. Right to Play, Adidas and the campaign spokesperson – international football star Zinedine Zidane, believe sports have the power to change the world. They have joined forces to raise awareness of sports crucial role in development. Together, they launched the global Red Ball initiative in Athens in 2006, in order to raise funds for Right to Play programmes around the world.

Co-branding

Brand expansion strategies can be applied to link a new product to an existing business or family brand with its own series of associations. An existing brand can also leverage associations through tie-ins with other brands from the same company or others. Cobranding occurs when two or more existing brands are merged into a joint product, or when they are jointly marketed through other means, such as Flexa VT Wonen paint and the Senseo offered by Philips and Douwe Egberts. Ingredient branding plays a key role in such strategies. (This subject will be discussed in the next paragraph). Brand alliances can be applied to bundle a large group of brands, as is often the case in the airline industry. Examples include the Star Alliance, a conglomerate of sixteen different airlines including United Airlines, Lufthansa and Singapore Airlines. Crucially, co-branding allows for products to be positioned in a unique and convincing manner thanks to the large number of brands within the alliance. Co-branding will often allow the brand to establish more convincing similarities or differences – or both – than would otherwise have been the case. The brand can then generate more turnover within the existing target group and capitalise more effectively on the opportunities offered by new consumers and distribution channels. Co-branding can also help reduce the costs of product introductions, as it combines the two well-known images and helps speed up the selection process. Co-branding can be an especially useful way of creating a distinctive product in poorly differentiated categories.²⁷ The potential disadvantages of co-branding consist of risk factors and lack of control, due to the fact that consumers will now establish connections with another brand in their own minds. Consumer expectations as to both brands' degree of involvement and commitment will generally be high.

Ingredient branding

Ingredient branding is a special form of co-branding whereby added brand value is created for materials, components or parts that make up an integral part of other brand products. Successful ingredient brands include Intel Inside processors and chip sets, Gore-Tex water retardant fibres and the Teflon non-stick coating. Consumers generally view the ingredients used in ingredient branding strategies as a hallmark of quality. The uniformity and predictability of ingredient brands can help reduce risks while putting consumers' minds at ease. These ingredients often tend to become the industry standard, with consumers no longer willing to purchase products that do not contain them. In other words: ingredient brands can actually become a product category similarity. Consumers do not necessarily need to know how the part or component works – as long as they are aware that it represents added value.



Celebrity endorsement & testimonials

Efforts to deploy famous and generally admired people to endorse products are known as celebrity endorsements. A celebrity can focus attention on the brand and help shape perceptions, as consumers draw conclusions on the basis of their existing knowledge of the celebrity. The celebrity effectively projects onto the endorsed brand, as the associations linked to their image are transferred to the brand product. In order for this strategy to work, the celebrity must be famous enough to increase brand awareness, improve the brand's image and encourage greater consumer engagement. Celebrities used to endorse the organisation or product (testimonial) must be highly visible and should offer a rich set of potentially useful associations, opinions and feelings.²⁸ Ideally, the celebrity should also be credible in terms of their expertise, reliability, friendly image and/or attractive appearance. The person should also evoke concrete associations that are relevant to the brand organisations or product brand.

Well-known examples include George Clooney acting on behalf of the Nespresso coffee brand and singer Beyoncé representing Pepsi. Pepsi has been using famous athletes and musicians as a part of its celebrity endorsement strategy for years now. It should be pointed out that such deals can be highly lucrative for both parties. For example, investments in the Beyoncé campaign came to 50 million dollars.²⁹ This generated a great deal of publicity for Beyoncé's new album, while helping Pepsi to further reinforce its brand value (11.5 billion dollars in 2014).³⁰

4.3 Brand experience (brand behavior)

Experience is as broad concept, but can be described as the confluence of perception, activities, feelings and the experience of time.³¹ In addition to experiences and emotions, experience is also linked to behavior; the user must have an open attitude (receptiveness) and take action in order to experience something, even if this consists of undergoing 'the experience' in a 'relaxed' manner. The residual feeling in the wake of an experience is especially important, as it will remain stored in our memory in the form of a relevant (visual and emotional) memory trace that can be recalled and relived at a later stage. Knowledge of our recollection of memories is thus crucial. We are more likely to remember images, emotions and activities that are linked to previously accrued experiences and feelings. As mentioned, brand experience starts with a willingness to undergo experiences and remember them on an associative, emotional and behavioral level (in the absence of such willingness, no brand loyalty or added brand value will be generated). The experience being offered should reflect the promise and basically align with the previously described brand feelings: it should have appeal ('I like this, I think it's nice, beautiful, interesting, etc.), entice and challenge ('I'd like to buy/try this') and reflect the 'consumer's own goals and values' ('The brand personality reflects my self-expression and I prove this – to myself and others – through my use of this particular brand').

Exceeding expectations

Successful brands offer an experience that exceeds expectations, engage in interaction and are rewarded with heartfelt recommendations.³² They have ambassadors rather than customers, who feel connected to the brand and communicate its value in a positive manner. This is highly relevant in view of the often social and communicative nature of brand experience. For example, brand experience must be rapidly shareable, both online and offline. Touch points should be developed as a part of the effort to build brand experiences, enabling users to rapidly share their experiences and communicate efficiently with one another and the brand organisation. As a case in point, Dutch airline KLM responds to customer questions through its (virtually) real-time online customer service on social media platforms Facebook and Twitter: this represents a key part of KLM users' customer journey. This helps KLM generate a great deal of positive responses and (free) publicity, as users share the communications on their public (or partially public) Facebook and Twitter timelines. Crucially, the audience must get a sense of the organisation's motives and core values during all points of the interaction.³³

The customer journey and the importance of experience

A customer journey can be defined as the mental journey experienced by users from the moment they first encounter a product or service.³⁴ Brand organisations must design their products and services in such a way that users can be navigated through the entire customer journey in the most effective, safe and pleasant manner possible. This basically involves designing behavior; any situations that could cause danger or stress must be avoided in this process. The customer journey encompasses all touch points encountered by the user. These touch points, the moments key to the user experience, must ultimately lead to the desired experience or solution. This could consist of a new, exciting or relaxing experience (such as going on a trip or playing a game) or a social event (going out on the town with family and friends), but can also offer safety and security (taking out a mortgage). Although the emphasis will often be on safety and predictability (which, lest we forget, prevent stress and save time), the journey may also include unpredictable and surprising moments that keep the brand experience lively and challenging.

The brand experience may be a brief, one-off affair, but can also take place over a longer period of time; this will generally involve a brand relationship.³⁵ However, customers' perception of brand quality must also be good during one-off interactions, as memories will last longer than the actual experiences on which they are based. Unlike longer-term brand relationships involving a higher degree of loyalty and more tolerance for mistakes, there will be no time to 'repair' a bad experience. This should be taken into account, as both good – and, more often – bad experiences will be shared for years to come. Although people may forget specific details (such as the literal wording of a conversation), they never forget the emotions they felt during the experience. Negative experiences are stored in our emotional memory, where they remain for the rest of our lives. These emotions then resurface in comparable situations. Emotions are not limited to our feelings about an experience (our inner experience), but also relate to the expression of behavior (visible experience). Clearly, negative public comments about a bad experience will have a detrimental effect on the brand image.

Brand emotions

Emotions serve as key anchors for our memory and the resulting decision-making behaviors. This implicit knowledge, which is largely processed at a subconscious level, help us to determine the relevance and importance of the information we obtain. We can apply the fact that our brains process this information at a subconscious level (leaving little opportunity for rational and reflexive adjustment) to influence behavior and optimise routines. Transmitting an effective message thus largely revolves around evoking the appropriate emotions: emotions are key triggers for action and behavioral modification (many purchasing decisions are made on the basis of emotional reasons and subsequently rationalised). However, it is important to make sure we evoke the right emotions, as the wrong ones can distract from the brand message. Exclusively triggering positive emotions would eventually lead to a loss of credibility, whereas rational arguments alone could eventually detract from our effectiveness. The use of negative emotions (which may be necessary from time to time) could cause consumers to associate the brand with negative connotations (due to less appealing emotional values and undesirable associations). In order to apply this technique effectively, we must thus ensure that the emotions we evoke accurately reflect the nature of the brand message and interaction. The implicit emotional associations should be closely aligned with the motives and objectives of all relevant stakeholders and users. For instance, the Dutch National Postcode Lottery evokes both positive and negative emotions. Naturally, the positive emotion and seductive key association are the chance of winning money. On the negative side, however, you may feel resentful at the thought that your neighbours might become millionaires while you lose out (having neglected to buy a lottery ticket in your postcode zone). These negative emotions and associations are basically an implicit engine behind the lottery's success.

We do not necessarily have to make all knowledge available at once in order to be successful; the most successful brands have clear and consistent archetypal narratives (brand personality), which will then bind users with the appropriate emotions and behaviors to the brand. A more in-depth relationship with the brand can then be developed at a later stage.

Emotions are key anchors in our memory and behavior.

Thinking in terms of a brand experience ecosystem

Searching, finding, buying, renting, using, experiencing, storing and reliving. A customer journey can consist of a considerable number of steps, and may take place in various locations over a longer period of time. The customer journey primarily consists of the pre-experience (orientation, inspiring, informing), interaction during the brand experience itself (fulfilment) and the post-experience (storing the experience in your memory and the ability to 'take the experience with you' and relive it). As a case in point, consider a visit to a music festival: you start by visiting the festival website to check out photos and band line-ups; you then decide to go (possibly with someone else) and buy the tickets; next, you visit the actual festival and consume the available range of products and services; you enjoyed the experience and subsequently relive it by looking at photos and videos (either ones you made yourself, or those posted on the festival website by third parties).

Although brand experience may be designed to capitalise on a specific sub-aspect of the overall experience (creating an optimal experience or peak experience to coincide with a specific moment or action), brand experiences are most effective when developed to take account of the entire brand experience ecosystem; this will ensure that the brand experience is optimally consistent and predictable within the overall perception of the brand.³⁶ Take the example of the music festival: traffic flows must be effectively managed, as no one wants to spend ages in a traffic jam to get there (or go home at the end). Every aspect counts towards the overall experience. User and brand basically enter into a symbiosis over the course of the customer journey. The user and brand jointly create a new experience by interacting with the product or service. This interaction takes place within a multidimensional ecosystem.

We can identify four different dimensions in the experience ecosystem: the product, the person interacting with the product (either on their own or together with others), the environment in which the interaction takes place and the duration of the interaction. These dimensions are described in brief below:

Artefact (as a brand product)

The intrinsic product or service experience: what does the product or service actually do? Which experiences can it offer, which problems can it solve, how user-friendly is it and which emotional experiences does it facilitate? The emphasis will generally be on increasing the user's level of happiness, pleasure or convenience. Artefact experience is characterised by the fact that although (mass produced) products or services are generic, they must be designed in a way that allows the user to 'make them their own' through personalisation. For instance, mobile phone users buy phone covers to emphasise their personal identities, and adjust the personal interface settings – such as icons, backgrounds and home screens – in the user system. Manufacturers ensure that users have a range of options at their disposal to do so.

Person (as a brand user)

The personal, humanised experience: although this experience may be intended for a single individual (such as the coffee pad for one), user experiences are perceived in a more positive light when they can be shared at a social level (drinking coffee together, for example). For instance, people take photographs to record their personal memories, but are also motivated by the desire to share these moments with others. Users do want their experience to be unique (exclusively applicable to them).

Users expect the experience to reflect their own personal wishes and needs, and – at minimum – to improve their lives (self-development) or – the ultimate goal – permanently add value to their lives by offering moments of self-reflection (actualisation). The latter could take the form of an ecstatic peak experience.

The environment (in a social context)

The overall environmental experience: broader impact on the living environment. Although brand experience may affect the individual (enjoying your new Vibram FiveFingers shoes, for instance), most experiences have a broader social impact on the world around us. This is partly due to the fact that they are experienced and shared together (others will also see and respond to your unique, quirky sneakers). Keep in mind: all visible actions have an impact on those who observe them. To wear a brand is to behave in accordance with that brand. This will also change other people's behavior and perception at that moment.

Time (in the context of momentum)

Time can be described as a succession of individual moments. The time between events has great impact on our perception. We perceive some moments as being too short (in the case of pleasure or happiness), and others as being too long (in the case of stress or boredom). The sequence and perception of time in between interactions are determining factors in terms of a positive brand experience. Although quick is often better, for example, this is not always the case. Time spent waiting can be boring, but anticipation can also build up tension towards the 'magic moment'. Time is thus a crucial aspect in the development of an effective customer journey.

Customer experience of the Dutch Toon® thermostat

An effective example of this overall experience would be the interactive thermostat (Toon®) developed by energy supplier Eneco, offering insight into energy consumption levels. The thermostat features an attractive design, is quite user-friendly thanks to a clear, easy to use interface, and can be controlled remotely through a mobile app. The tablet version reinforces our sense of freedom and control by offering additional touch points, such as wireless control throughout the entire house. This covers the facet of product experience. Thanks to its ease of use (user experience) and motivational information provision capacity, the thermostat also offers a personal experience in which usage is rewarded in the form of appreciation and confirmation through smarter energy consumption. This serves to create an affective and humanised experience. Users can also compare their consumption with that of neighbours and friends; the solution thus serves as a social medium in which multiple households can participate by sharing personal information. Ultimately, the aim is to learn from one another's energy consumption profiles, and achieve joint benefits by reducing energy consumption. This leads us to the environmental aspect and sustainable impact of the solution. In addition to conserving, users have the sense that the thermostat will help them contribute to a better world. Eneco's solution visibly adds value to an invisible, low-involvement product: energy.

4.4 Brand loyalty (brand trust)

Brand loyalty is the (biased) willingness of people to commit to a brand for a prolonged period of time.³⁸ They have a deeper motivation for committing to a brand. The fact that people make repeat purchases is often interpreted as loyalty, although it is simply the rational embodiment of this. Buyers do not have to feel an emotional bond with the brand. Consumers may perhaps purchase the product based on its availability or low price. If another brand is cheaper or if only another brand is available, consumers will purchase that instead. This purely instrumental relationship could be termed 'false' loyalty.³⁹ 'True' loyalty, however, runs deeper. This is literally the case, since rational decisions are primarily taken in the cerebral cortex, while emotional brand behaviors and feelings are found deeper in the brain, in particular in the emotional brain (neural structures in the limbic system). Emotional behaviors leading to a deeper brand loyalty generally entail an inner intuitive emotional perception, based on trust. Consumers develop a positive bias and implicit behavioral response. This leads to users becoming more sensitive to brand manifestations (e.g. a brand being recognised more readily due to personal use). The user responds more positively and may, for instance, also recognise others due to certain brand behavior. Consumers feel involved with and connected to a brand, as well as each other. Therefore, the Build Bridge Bond® method also focuses on the psychological brand relationship aspects, alongside the brand-strategic organisational objectives. Although people tend to view themselves as independent and to a greater or lesser extent individualistic persons, by nature we are social creatures. Our life largely takes place within social structures (such as at work or among relatives and friends), but also within larger structures which have an effect on our social life (such as environment, culture or beliefs). Without our being consciously aware of it, our brain constantly steers us towards finding, developing and maintaining relationships. Therefore the emphasis in brand development lies not solely on identity and positioning, but also on creating meaningful experiences and developing brand trust.

Every relationship begins with trust

Trust is something that must first be given in order to receive it, and this begins with emanating trustworthiness (being credible).⁴⁰ People often tend to view brands as people. Like a person, a brand that behaves consistently in the long term emanates credibility, since it says something about the certainty, the predictive power regarding its future. To this end, the brand does not need to be 'sexy' or constantly innovative, but it must function at a constant level in the long term. This is what makes it a solid, strong brand. In Essence, these brands are messengers of sustainable trust. Consumers know what to expect. Better yet, consumers actively dislike surprises. A good example concerns the bicycle tire repair kits marketed by Simson since 1881 in an iconic black and red tin. This has to do with trust at product level: the brand has been relevant for years and years, and meets an instrumental need. It is a functional brand. If the brand, in addition to being seen as relevant and reliable, can also lend itself to meaningful brand perception, this entails trust at emotional level. We then refer to a symbolic brand, since it represents more than just the product. This kind of brand garners passionate users who promote the brand by speaking in enthusiastic terms about their experiences. If brand experiences are repeatedly positively confirmed (brand affirmation), this leads to a sustainable relationship and brand loyalty.⁴¹ The brand attains a permanent position in the decision-making process and thus becomes a reference point for trust.⁴² This trust is reflected in an increased brand involvement, loyalty, risk appetite and dependency (trust is put in it blindly). Brand loyalty often shows itself in unconscious (implicit) loyalty, for example when someone simply trusts that a product will be good, or in conscious (explicit) loyalty, for example

when users recommend a brand or defend it because it is important to them.⁴³ In addition, more and more consumers are seeking connection and meaningfulness in relation to companies and brands. They want to engage actively, take responsibility and contribute to the objectives of the brand organisation. This form of involvement (brand engagement) is becoming increasingly important to businesses, since it leads to more sustainable relationships and responsible growth.⁴⁴

From brand consideration to brand affirmation

Brand loyalty can be traced back to two important psychological factors: affirmation and reliance. People are constantly in search of feedback that validates their choices. Often this need for affirmation is the result of feelings of insecurity or a lack of knowledge and self-confidence ('Is this the right decision?'). In such considerations, strong brands can serve as a guiding force, since they are intuitively viewed as more reliable. In addition, people may have developed brand preferences which suit a certain (desirable) lifestyle which they enjoy seeing affirmed by the outside world. This affirmation is important and in some cases is conditional to taking an independent position. In this light, users who clearly incorporate brand preferences in their self-expression will not easily switch brands, since their identity is connected to the brand. These factors are described below.

Brand affirmation

Brand affirmation is the confirmation of the perception of what people (either individually or collectively) view as true, in particular in relation to brands and businesses. Increasing numbers of people define brand trust as the collective judgement that consumers have regarding a brand.⁴⁵ We see that a brand or brand organisation is transparent and congruent in its promise, partaking and purpose, and that this is confirmed by users. As such, brand affirmation is viewed as the driving force for credibility. Brand affirmation also entails confirming a personal brand relationship by approving and rewarding behavior. The relationship is confirmed by positive brand interactions which build security, brand security, confidence and self-confidence. This emotional response ensures that our expectations are positively adjusted and that dopamine levels in our brain increase⁴⁶, giving us the pleasant feeling that we are doing good in some sense. This is based on the principle that the brain creates routines (short-cuts) when something goes well due to repeated mutual affirmation. We then believe such matters more readily because we have seen or heard them before. This gives us cognitive ease and a pleasant feeling of recognition.⁴⁷ Every day we make hundreds of minor and major decisions which are often predictable because we already know the outcome (luckily, since otherwise there would be quite a lot of accidents). The more often this outcome is emotionally positive, the more trust ensues and the more certain we become in our behavior.⁴⁸ This is also the case for brand organisations that perform sustainably. Credible brands that constantly do what they promise to, confirm their message time and again, thus strengthening and confirming its consequences.

Strong brands can serve as a guiding force, since they are intuitively viewed as more reliable. But brand affirmation is seen as the real driving force for trust.

Brand reliance

Brand loyalty is the (self-chosen) dependency on a brand, due to, for example, a new investment not being able to outweigh the brand utility already present. Mac users, for example, will not switch to a Windows PC any time soon, and vice versa. Not only are there differences in brand images, but it would also entail learning new routines, such as working with a new user interface. Due to investments in time, money and image made earlier, acquiring or reacquiring a brand product selected at an earlier juncture is preferred. Sometimes brand loyalty leads to a self-chosen obligation which users are willing to commit to in the long term (sometimes even for life, e.g. when someone has their favourite brand logo tattooed). In such cases, due to their dependency, users can be quite forgiving if a product or service temporarily does not function properly or is not readily available. However, if trust is really damaged, the break-up is usually final, as is the case in human relationships.

Goods and services that do not require major investments or reinvestments, and which resemble one another in a product-technical or emotional sense (with regard to identity, positioning, use or perception), are easier to switch between. This is, for instance, the case when trust has been built in a certain product category by a name brand market leader, but the product category subsequently has to be shared with new brands or supermarket own brands. If the original name brand does not have sufficient distinctive qualities, there is a real chance that consumers will switch to a comparable (cheaper) product. In that case it is necessary to introduce distinctive factors in the brand pillars.

Brand trust

We can view trust as a psychological state which is connected to personal motives and underlying emotions which are evoked by negative or positive and predictable expectations. Rousseau et al. (1988) describe trust as the intention to accept this vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another.⁴⁹ Trust has determined our choices since time immemorial. Trust therefore is an old mental and emotional steering mechanism and thus makes its mark on the decision-making processes in our brain, some of which are unconscious ones. Therefore it is essential to understand which stimuli determine our brand perception and preferences, how we store brands in our brain (mental representations) and how we emotionally perceive experiences or brand experiences. Note that the value of a brand is not so much embodied in the instrumental attributes (since these can be copied), but in particular in the uniqueness, sincerity, emotional value and perceived quality. If a brand is truly interested in us and prepared to meet our wishes, we will award that brand our trust and be loyal.⁵⁰ This leads to a positive choice for the brand and a sustainable brand-customer relationship. This relationship revolves around trust, since every relationship is built on sharing trust, whether it is a brief or a long one, be it social or economic.⁵¹ Trust is the social adhesive causing us to do things together, share things with one another and exchange personal information about ourselves and each other.

Brand trust is the basis for a strong brand that creates brand value (brand equity) for the brand organisation, and personal value (brand utility) for the customer.

To build (brand or social) trust you must invest in the long-term

According to Keller (1993, 2001) brand value reinforces top-of-mind associations (brand knowledge) in the mind of the consumer.⁵² And if we can match this knowledge to concrete needs, long-lasting behavior is created during purchase and use. As a result, we build networks of associations. But this takes time (and resources). Thus, if you want to build consumer awareness about a brand, you first must build that network of relevant associations. Which brand associations affect the attitude and loyalty leading to consumer behavior? Which association nodes create value for the brand? The more often these connected associations are evoked by stimuli in certain situations, the deeper these interconnections are interwoven and anchored in memory, and the stronger the nodes between different or interconnected associations. The firmer and tighter this network of associations, the more sustainable and more likely it is to gain trust. Because our decision-making is based on (unconscious) automatic behavior. These fixed association networks that lead to routines and trusted shortcuts represent the brand value. The more robust the mental brand share, the greater the trust. This applies to both brands and people. Trust is therefore the basis for (brand) relationships and a prerequisite for achieving brand leadership.

These principles also apply to digital networks in the online world. The more people use the same social networks, the more trust they create in these networks. This kind of trust was not only relevant in my own research on online privacy and trust in 1996,⁵³ but also emphasized by Google CEO Eric Schmidt 13 years later in his Penn Commencement speech: 'In the network world, trust is the most important currency.'⁵⁴ In 2017 Google's brand value was estimated over \$100 billion, and Apple even over \$170 billion.⁵⁵

Brand Trust - The essence of a strong brand

Brand trust is the basis of a strong brand that creates brand value for the organisation (brand equity), and personal value (brand utility) for the customer. It is one of the most valuable (mental) attributes that a brand can possess, because trust is indispensable in building sustainable (brand) relationships. This makes trust the essence of a strong brand. And from this point of view, we can not see brand trusts from brand motives and brand loyalty. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) define this as follows: 'Brand trust is the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of a brand (organization) to perform its stated function.'⁵⁶ By ensuring a consistent brand promise, derived by the congruent values from the brand's purpose, consumers feel less vulnerable in taking part and engaging with the brand, because they know they can count on their trusted brand. This trust is a predictive value for brand preferences, behavior and loyalty. If people show confidence in a brand, they also develop a functional, emotional or behavioral intent towards this brand. People are more likely to believe and trust the intentions of the brand to serve their interests. And that is linked to meeting their personal needs and shared values. And as described in this chapter, loyalty can be viewed as the degree to which we are loyal to a brand or brand product which meets our wishes. The more unique a product is (i.e. the less copyable it is by others) and the stronger the belief that the brand acts predictably in positive fashion, the stronger the dependency and created trust in the brand. This is why trust is the essence of a strong brand.

5 BBB – Brand modality

During their contact with a brand, consumers experience a number of phases which all require their own tone of voice (brand modality). Consumers desire a suitable story that answers their need for information at that juncture. How are the promise and the experience of the product described and what can consumers expect, both in the short and the long term?⁵³ Will the company still exist a year from now? The brand organisation must therefore clearly indicate its purpose and make a relevant promise to consumers regarding its brand products and services. A purchase takes place after deliberation and then the consumer uses the supplied product or service. If their experience is good, a connection with the brand is created and the brand manufacturer becomes important to the consumer. Users develop a connection to the brand through the emotional experience and not through product functionality. For instance, people indicate that they prefer drinking a certain brand of coffee because they consider 'the brand' to be good and not perse because of a certain blend (which is the functional taste description). Of course the coffee may taste fine, so the promise is a good one. However, people do not have any connection with the coffee beans itself (commodity), although they do have one with the brand via the brand experience, which is often a social one. And in social interaction we share our values. So, it is important that the values represented by the brand organisation fits our own values (brand fit).

Brand manifestation in three modalities

In brief, a brand or brand organisation thus requires a product promise, ways of partaking and an organisationasl purpose with shared values in order to build sustainable brand trust and to achieve engagement and behavioral change. In order to build a brand-customer relationship, all modalities are required. The BBB method thus considers all three of these brand modalities, the tone of voice in which the brand manifests itself in the world:

Promise level (benefits)

Describes the product functionality and the benefits that determine the (controlled) positioning. A consumer encounters a brand and is attracted by the brand promise. What is the added value?

Partaking level (experience)

Shared user experiences that determine the (uncontrolled) brand image. Consumers must be able to imagine what the brand experience will be like and what its effect is on others. For example, will others also want and be able to participate?

Purpose level (values)

Organisational values and business objectives that determine the brand personality. What does the brand organisation stand for? What do consumers propagate with the brand?

We connect via social interaction, where we share our personal values, represented by the brands we use.

A customer journey is not a linear proces

Brand development today is no longer a linear process . People come into contact with a brand at different contact points and moments. They want to experience a consistent brand at later times and in other situations, providing relevant information at the moment, as that is important for building a trust relationship. In case of incongruent (not appropriate or unreliable) information, we soon lose our confidence. Using modalities can prevent that. People expect - from a trustworthy and empathic brand - a clear (prosocial and sustainable) goal (purpose), proven quality and impeccable guarantee (promise), and an positive experience that is easy to share (partaking). These are 'human and compassionate' brands that allow you to engage in a sustainable brand relationship. Not so much because you want it as an individual, but just because other people want that too. You would like to hear from your social groep and share the same (brand) values. For example, you buy Ben & Jerry's ice cream because the taste is good, but it is also very nice to show this brand experience to others or share this feeling with each other.

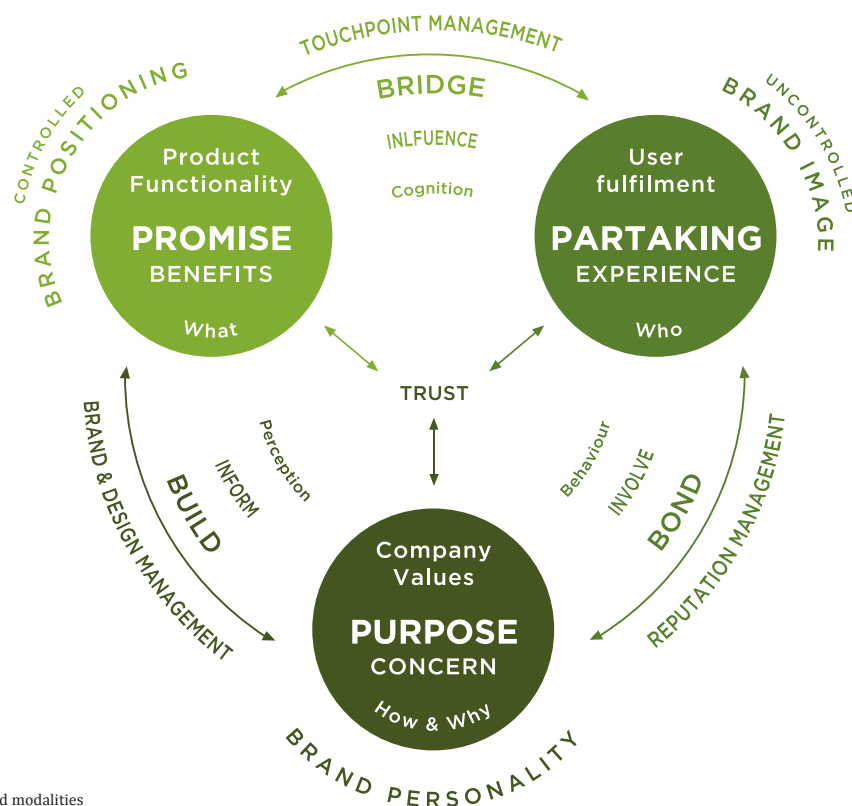


Figure 7

Build Bridge Bond brand modalities

Using modalities lets you go through all transition phases

While building trust, consumers go through all of the modalities (and thus also the Build Bridge Bond transition phases). Therefore, for as far as possible, all of the modalities should be represented in the brand communication. In this regard, the raison d'être and the long-term goals of the organisation should be portrayed (purpose), as well as the added value of the product (promise) and the future brand experience for the user (partaking). Sustainable brand thinking thus requires looking ahead: from purpose to promise to partaking to purpose, etc.

The three modalities are briefly described in the following section.

5.1 Purpose modality

The 'purpose' modality describes the core values and objectives of the brand organisation. These determine the long-term corporate behavior of the brand owner. This behavior also forms the brand personality (Why do we do the things we do? What is the objective? What does the organisation stand for?), It encompasses the tone of voice at organisational level. This modality is part of both the Brand building and the Brand loyalty phases.

As this chapter has shown us, future-proof brand development is about creating brand trust based on sustainable brand relationships. In order to achieve this, a brand must be consistent (operate in the same manner) and congruent (in keeping) with the company core, the core values of a brand organisation. Based on this 'core', a brand must act and communicate believably at each modality level. This should be done with regard to the brand promise by developing relevant products (brand building), with regard to the brand experience by creating meaningful experiences (brand loyalty).

5.2 Promise modality

The 'promise' modality describes the product advantages. This description determines the positioning, often based on instrumental advantages. At this level, brand owners create brand awareness in consumers via physical and functional brand attributes. This forms part of the Brand building phase and can be monitored. The brand owner determines what the brand or brand product and the brand communication look like and what the product does. This often serves as the initial introduction to the brand.

Where previously the focus was on positioning the explicit advantages of the brand promise, now, communicating the brand partaking (social experience) and brand purpose is also becoming increasingly important. In addition to the functional and emotional product and partaking proposition, nowadays positioning also serves a function in propagating the underlying corporate organisational values. All of these modalities count in the user deliberation (in the Bridging phase).

5.3 Partaking modality

The 'partaking' modality describes the (social and emotional) user experience. Who are the users, what is their behavior and who can share the experience? This determines the social brand experience. The brand organisation should address the deeper and shared motives of stakeholders and users. The partaking modality is part of the Brand loyalty phase, which is a phase that cannot be controlled. The brand users determine how the brand is used and how they communicate about it (positively or negatively). Displaying their use of the brand and whether or not users subsequently recommend it play a strong role in determining the brand image.

Listening to users and responding to their wishes leads to positive confirmation. Users come to trust the brand (brand reputation). In addition, users will then use the products and services more frequently and recommend them more often. The emotional involvement leads to users feeling recognised and acknowledged, and to their developing a connection with the brand (in the Brand loyalty phase). Users feel they suit the brand personality.

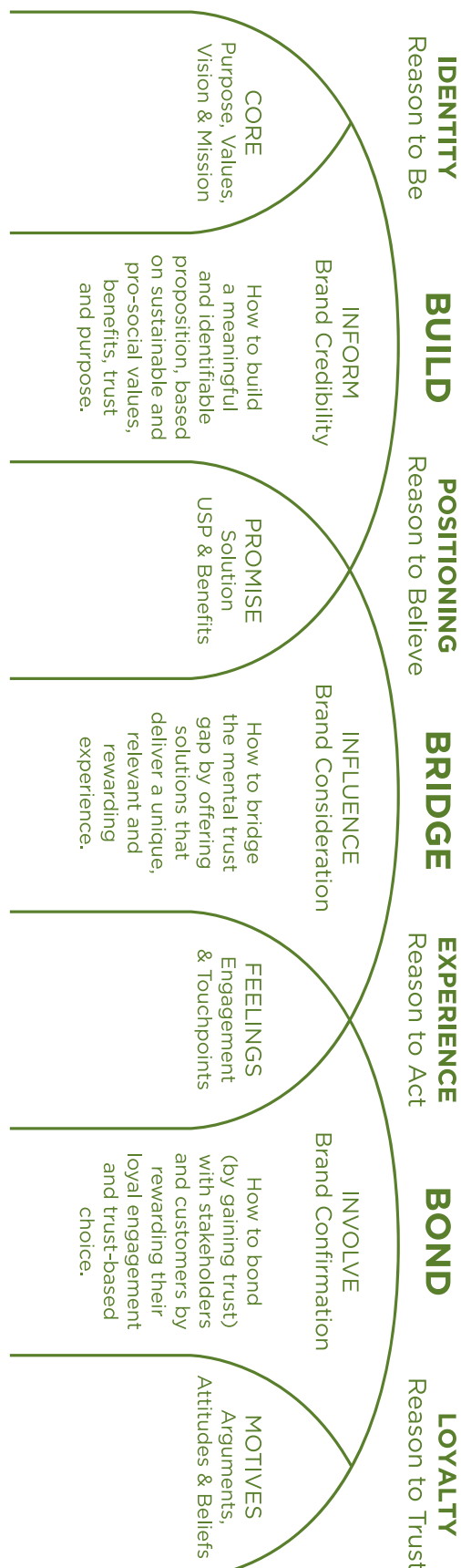
The role of brand personality – identity based on self-image and behavior

People perceive a brand as a personality with its own identity and corresponding behavior, which in the social sciences is also referred to as ‘social agents’. We attribute human features to brands. As brand personality, brands not only represent certain values and norms, but also have the ability to pursue these values as an independent entity. This objective, usually referred to in the organisation’s mission and vision, also forms the *raison d’être* of the brand organisation and the brands that belong to it. It is important that both the brand and the brand values are shared by all stakeholders (shared values), that is both within the brand organisation by everyone involved, as well as externally by the end users. Remember that the personality of a brand must be congruent with the users’ own (desired) personality. It must suit the self-image (‘This brand suits me’), which will lead to users propagating the brand. The brand thus becomes a cultural and social communication means (‘Which group do I belong to?’), thus creating new values, without the direct involvement of the brand organisation. This ultimately leads to what is referred to as ‘shared brand ownership’, meaning that the brand owner is no longer the sole owner of the brand and no longer has complete control of it since end users have literally appropriated the brand. As such, end users form the ‘uncontrolled’ brand image, which to an extent determines the brand reputation. This as opposed to the ‘controlled’ brand identity which is determined by the ‘original’ brand owner. However, ultimately one party will always remain responsible for the behavior of the organisation, which is the brand organisation itself.

Brand image – Reputation based on shared behavior

In 4.1 brand image was described to be the collectively shared image that the public has of a brand or brand organisation. Whereas the brand identity is determined by an organisation’s internal vision and (shared) brand values, the image is comprised of people’s external perceptions based on the brand’s assumed identity and positioning. If brand organisations have an image problem, at times this is difficult to investigate. They then should actually question all involved stakeholders and the general public in order to gain a better understanding of the diminished reputation, although even this may not yield a satisfying answer since not all factors may be easily traceable. If a brand is not sufficiently innovative, a brand or brand product may simply no longer suit a new era due to fashion or new technology. This means that the brand has reached the end of its life cycle. It’s history. Yet this does not necessarily mean that this is the end of the story. Many old brands enter a second life because consumers enjoy nostalgic brands with an authentic story and experience to match. However, the product will have been adapted to suit the times. For example, food products will usually contain more pure and authentic ingredients, or the products will have a cleaner and more sustainable production process.

6 Working with the BBB work matrix



You can use the BBB work matrix (on page 48) to develop a new brand portfolio in line with the general mission and vision, and as an instrument for assessing brand management and already developed brands. The worksheet is filled in by going through the transition phases and brand features within the Build Bridge Bond structure. In order to describe the three brand modalities, use the Promise-Partaking-Purpose model. Both can be formulated in the work matrix and tested for consistency and congruence. The outcomes can then be incorporated in a vision document for further development, brand management, internal and external communication and/or marketing purposes.

6.1 Brand profile: describing the brand based on core values

First give a concise, relevant description of the organisation (the profile) and the features of the brand organisation: mission, vision, strategy, core values, culture, internal culture, brand personality and (if these exist) the connected visual brand expressions. This description is used to maintain consistency and congruence in each phase.

Then describe the strategic objectives for each phase and what must be done to achieve these. This should ultimately result in a strategic working plan which can be used to substantiate a consistent brand policy vision.

6.2 Brand identity: informing stakeholders – Purpose

Describe the brand values, mission, vision, aim, objectives and advantages (the reason to be). What do the identity and brand personality look like (the brand as a 'person') seen in a single consistent light? Identify the brand elements and how the perception (internal or external focus) thus is changed/strengthened.

Figure 8 Build Bridge Bond work matrix

6.3 Brand positioning: convincing stakeholders – Promise

What is the promise and the unique selling point (USP)? Which associations would the brand or brand organisation like to inspire? What is the brand essence (put as briefly as possible), given that this describes the domains that can be claimed mentally? Describe the (functional and/or emotional) brand promise and what brand knowledge stakeholders require to prove this to themselves or to others (the reason to believe).

6.4 Brand experience: involving stakeholders - Partaking

What is the brand experience (what is relevant and meaningful about it) and what desired behavioral change is required (the reason to act)? Which feelings (emotional response) must be elicited and how to you secure the positive associations experienced and the connected behavior in stakeholders and users (by which touch points in the customer journey)?

6.5 Brand loyalty: informing stakeholders – Purpose

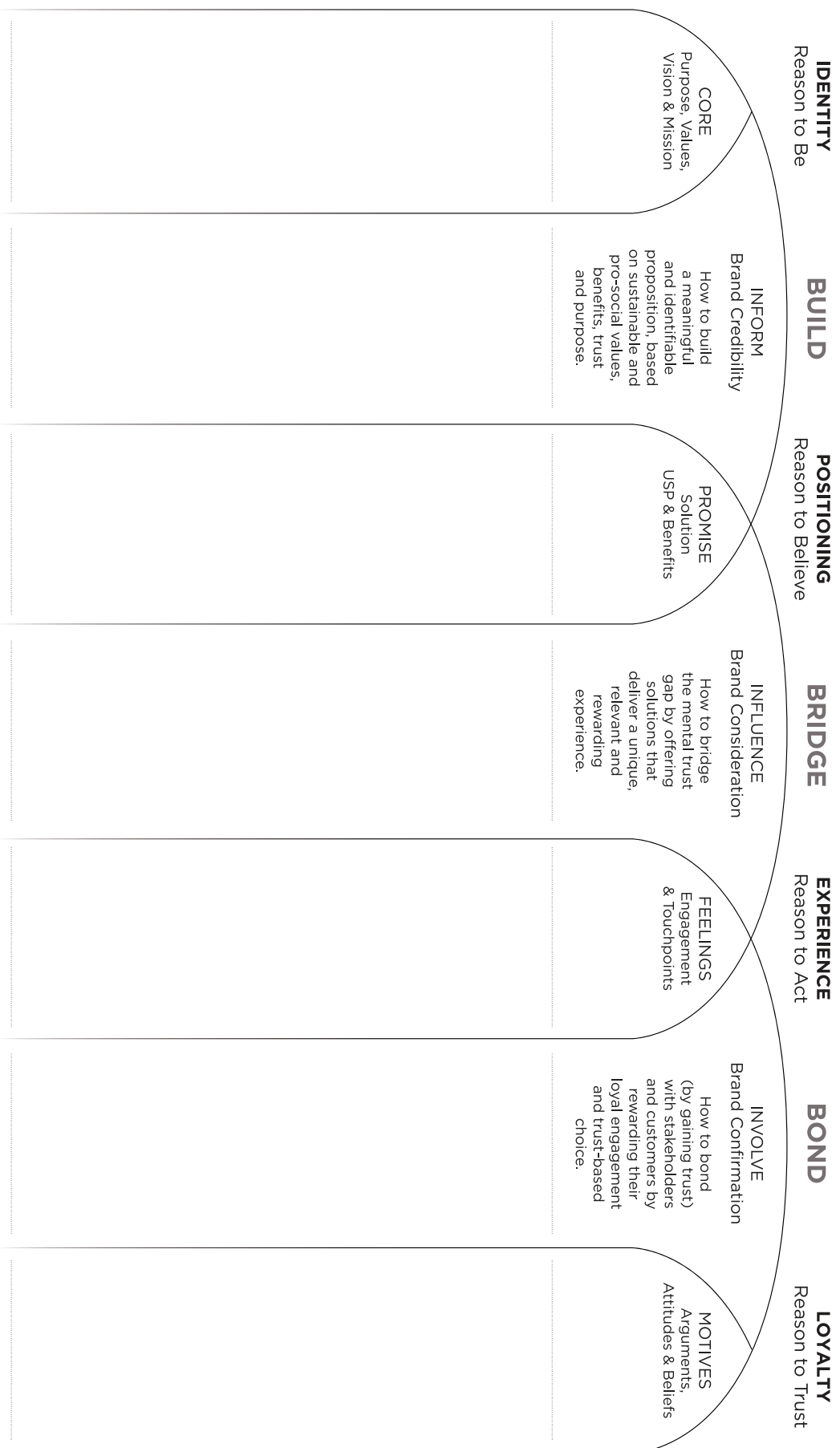
What are the motives and driving forces that the brand relationship is based on? How do we value loyalty (i.e. self-chosen dependency)? What is the mutual interest in having a relationship (the reason to trust)? How do we use loyal users as brand ambassadors and which benefit-driven arguments do we supply for passing on our brand story?

6.6 Filling in the transition phases Build, Bridge, Bond

After filling in the brand features, fill in the transition phases in between. In the building phase, describe which core associations the brand or brand organisation would like to communicate if the brand behaves based on the circumscribed brand personality (what the brand stands for). In the bridging phase, describe how doubts will be dispelled by convincing potential users based on the promise and reward (what does it yield). In the bonding phase, describe the routines which will bond the users and will elicit an emotional response through confirmation (brand behavior suits personal behavior). Trust will ultimately be consolidated by better recognising and acknowledging the needs of users via affirmation and dependency (by routine use or by propagating the brand as brand ambassador of the brand organisation).

6.7 From promise to partaking to purpose

It is important that all steps are consistent (applied in the same way) and congruent (in keeping with one another) with the company core, the vision and the mission of the brand. They have to fit in with the brand story being propagated, so that all interactions, contact moments (i.e. touch points), products and services contribute to the brand image. Add the stories of brand users to this and we have a circulating system, a symbiosis between brand owner and brand user: from promise (benefits) to partaking (experience) to purpose (values), to promise (benefits) to partaking (experience), etcetera. Consistently confirmed by the brand's identity, positioning, experience and mutual loyalty and trust. All these aspects form the basis for sustainable behavioral change and sustainable shared brand trust.



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